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When wood takes on fun life

SUBASHINI NAIR



Meeting children at Actors Studio Bangsar for *The Selfish Crocodile*



The puppets are carved by hand, says Davies

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THE STORYLINE: The animals in the forest are frightened of the selfish crocodile. No matter how much they try, he just won't let anyone drink from the river. Then, one day, the crocodile has the toothache — but nobody dares to help him, until a little mouse appears and bravely finds a way to solve this snappy dilemma.

A MOUSE and a gazelle made special appearances at Actor's Studio Bangsar, much to the delight of some screeching children who were waiting in line to watch The Selfish Crocodile by Britain's Blunderbus Theatre Company.

The animal antics were a precursor to the performance which was really an interactive experience.

Adapted by Bill Davies, The Selfish Crocodile brings a forest to life in full colour with simple green settings, an imaginary river and an array of mysterious animals grazing silently.

Based on the popular children's book by author Faustin Charles and Michael Terry, the story is about a very snappy crocodile and its adventures as he wanders through the forest and comes face to face with a gazelle, a giraffe, a wildebeast and a lion.

His friend is a brave little mouse.

Talented actors in dungarees skillfully manipulated life-sized puppets while the shadow puppetry in the background elaborated the storyline in this funny and intelligent story that has a happy ending.

The life-sized puppets are magnificent creations by Blunderbus ([www.blunderbus](http://www.blunderbus.co.uk).

[co.uk](http://www.blunderbus.co.uk)). They are carved by hand by Davies and company and have amazing true-to-life characteristics.

"It took six of us three days to complete the mouse, which was inspired by the Japanese Bunraku puppets," says Davies after the show.

"They are not easy to make.

One sometimes can take us months to complete. But creating a puppet that is almost real is important to us as it says everything about its character.

He adds that the mouse is made of polystyrene, brown paper and fibreglass.

For the show, the mouse was brilliantly controlled and manoeuvred by Davies and Claire Alizon, who was also the narrator.

That mouse was a naive, lovable character and proved to be the darling of the show as it beautifully captured the imagination of the children through its narration.

The children, who had earlier met the mouse outside the auditorium, responded enthusiastically every time it asked a question.

They also seemed to love the crocodile, controlled and voiced by Christian Knott, although it was dangerous and arrogant having claimed the entire river for itself.

He came across as a fierce crocodile, eating any animal that wanted a drink at his river.

Yet, he was also cheeky. The children picked up on this, as they constantly warned the crocodile to watch his back for the other animals.

"It's a cockney stereotype," says Knott, "which is seen in the way I walk and move my head. Bill (Davies) writes the characters based on these stereotypes and I have to pick up on them and make them part of me. It wouldn't be good if I were to do it like a Scotsman, would it?" The interaction between the actors and the children was constant. Taking time to find out children's names beforehand, the cast would drop them into the narrative as if they were old friends. Some children giggled as their names were used.

Having a group of children constantly laugh and talk to the performers during the show was something they were used to, says Jeannette Longworth who played the gazelle. "It can be quite distracting for some actors but we are used to it." Of course, she adds, the actors cannot respond to everything the children said during the show but sometimes it was necessary to make the play more interesting and the children feel important having their questions answered.

"There are times they throw a curve ball at you. I remember when I was playing the crocodile and I said I was lonely as I had no friends. One kid shouted, then get married," she says, giggling.

Davies believes that every show is a success when the children respond enthusiastically.

"Children can see past us although we are visibly there.

They have fantastic imagination and they respond well to the puppets. So it's important to believe in the jokes, as children know when you're pretending." The entire performance exuded fun and enthusiasm.

Judging by the enthusiastic response of the opening show's audience of children aged between four and seven last Tuesday really enjoyed themselves.

n The Selfish Crocodile, presented by Gardner & Wife Theatre, runs until April 27 at 10am on weekdays (Tues-Fri) and 11am on weekends at the Actors Studio, Bangsar Shopping Centre.

Tickets: RM42-RM64 plus ticketing fees. Reduced rates for OKU cardholders, schools and groups.

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I believe life teaches us who we are - a pretty strict teacher too, because life calls it the way life sees it... no ceremony, no sweetener, plus the camera adds five kg!

SAVOURS



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